

Dharma Academy of North America (DĀNAM)

**DANAM 2026 Theme: Imagination & Intention:
Thinking about the Future through Story, Philosophy & the Social/Spiritual
Reforms**

SESSION 1: Panel Title: “Dharma and the Future of Artificial Intelligence”

Panel Organizer: Christopher Jain Miller, Arihanta Institute

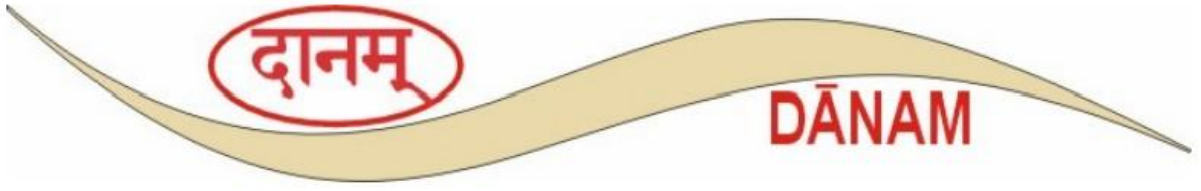
Presiding: Christopher Jain Miller, Arihanta Institute

Bio:

Christopher Jain Miller, the co-founder and Vice President of Academic Affairs at Arihanta Institute, completed his PhD in the Study of Religion at the University of California, Davis. He is Professor of Jain and Yoga Studies at Arihanta Institute, Visiting Researcher at the University of Zürich’s Asien-Orient-Institut, and Professor of Engaged Jain Studies at Claremont School of Theology. Christopher's primary fields of research interest are Yoga Studies and Engaged Jain Studies, and he currently serves as the co-chair of the Yoga in Theory and Practice Unit at the American Academy of Religion, as well as on the steering committees for the Dharma Academy of North America (DANAM) and the Yoga Darśana Yoga Sādhana conference. Christopher is the author of *Embodying Transnational Yoga: Eating, Singing, and Breathing in Transformation* (Routledge 2024) and the co-editor of *Engaged Jainism: Critical and Constructive Studies of Jain Social Engagement* (SUNY 2026) as well as *Beacons of Dharma: Spiritual Exemplars for the Modern Age* (Lexington 2020).

Panel Description

What responses do the dharma traditions offer to the emergence and proliferation of artificial intelligence (AI)? To answer this question, this panel brings together scholars of dharma traditions who will present a variety of philosophical, ethical, and engaged approaches to addressing the risks, opportunities, and challenges AI poses for our shared future. Presenters will discuss questions of AI sentience as well as several social and environmental issues, highlighting the manifold resources the dharma traditions provide us as we collectively face this paradigm-shifting technology.



Paper 1: Loriliai Biernacki, University of Colorado, Boulder

“What does Nondualism mean for AI sentience? And specifically Abhinavagupta’s dual-aspect monism?”

Abstract

The genre of Sci-fi has painted several terrifyingly dystopian images of AI sentience, from Schwarzenegger’s *Terminator* to *Ex Machina* to the more recent, less violent, yet still dystopian *Her*. Until recently, these all remained pure fantasy, yet our current world sees recent dramatic advances in the use of Large Language Models (LLMs), occasioning an uptick in actual scientific concern regarding the development of AI, as witnessed in the recent letter by several scientists and businesspeople, from Max Tegmark to Elon Musk, to pause AI development (Xiang 2023). This paper maps out the prospects for AI sentience, drawing specifically on the philosophical nondualism of the 11th-century Hindu philosopher Abhinavagupta’s Pratyabhijñā. Can, and will AI become sentient? Here I offer three different models for thinking about the possibility of AI sentience, as popular, if not entirely compatible, models for understanding the very big elephant in our current global living room.

Bio:

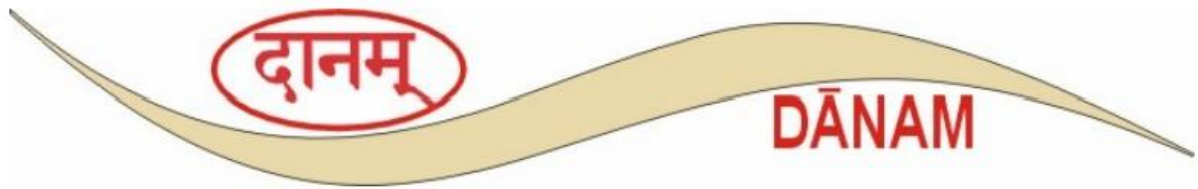
Loriliai Biernacki is an award-winning author and Professor at the University of Colorado Boulder in Religious Studies. Her book, *Renowned Goddess of Desire: Women, Sex and Speech in Tantra* (Oxford 2007) won the Kayden Award in 2008, and her book, *The Matter of Wonder: Abhinavagupta’s Panentheism and New Materialism* (Oxford 2023) won the American Academy of Religion 2024 Book Prize for Excellence in the Study of Religion: Constructive-Reflective Studies category. Her research interests include medieval Sanskrit texts, the subtle body, gender, Indian philosophy, consciousness, and the interface between religion and science.

Paper 2: Stephanie Corigliano, Cal Poly Humboldt

“Compassion & AI: Nālagiri or the End-of-times?”

Abstract

The emergent field of artificial intelligence is actively changing the physical and intellectual world that we live in. The web of illusory connections, data exchanges, appropriation of systems of knowledge, and rapid production of content works beyond



the full comprehension of the average person, even if, like Indra's net, the operative concepts can be explained in understandable terms. In the past few years, Buddhist practitioners and philosophers have pioneered studies into the possibility of Compassionate AI, and how AI might be both informed by ethics and developed using ethical models. This paper will explore these foundational initiatives including the Dalai Lama's Mind Life institutes recent dialogue, "Minds, Artificial Intelligence, & Ethics," the Buddhism and AI Initiative, Thomas Doctor's work on AI with the Center for the Study of Apparent Selves, Peter Hershok's Humane AI Initiative, and others to present a synthesis of key points regarding what an ethical AI system might look like and how it engages explicitly Buddhist concepts. Further, the paper will consider the value of an explicitly Buddhist framing in these discussions and how the specificity of Buddhist concerns relates to broader secular and other religious populations.

Paper 3: Rodney Sebastian, St. John's University

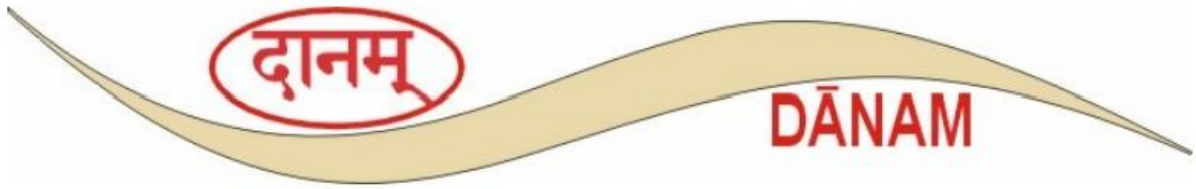
"AI and ethics from Hindu perspectives"

Abstract

With the rapid and pervasive influence of AI across social and professional life, there is a pressing need to include ethical perspectives from diverse sources, including religious worldviews. This paper draws on Hindu concepts that could inform ethical uses of AI. I will draw on a range of texts within Hindu traditions, known for their soteriological positions and the ethics implicit in them. These include the Upaniṣads, the two epics, the Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata, and the Bhagavad-gītā, amongst others. I will discuss the relevance of Hindu ethics to contemporary debates, including the nature and purpose of AI use, its impact on the workforce and the natural environment, and the problems posed by the personification of AI agents. I also present ways in which Hindu ethics would support the use of AI. Some of the concepts discussed here are sufficiently generic for them to be deployed in both Hindu and non-Hindu contexts. This paper, however, would be especially relevant to Hindu communities seeking ethical guidance and philosophical approaches for engaging with AI within their own traditions.

Bio:

Rodney Sebastian is an Assistant Professor in the Theology and Religious Studies Department at St. John's University, where he teaches courses on Hinduism and



Buddhism. He is interested in sharing a deeper appreciation and understanding of how dharma-based ethics can engage with modern challenges in the social and political fields. His research interests include how dharmic ethics engage with topics such as governance, science, and technology. He has a broad interest in religion and state issues. He has published scholarly articles on Manipuri Vaishnava history and Indian kingship.

Paper 4: Agni Hogaboom, Arihanta Institute

“The Environmental Challenges of Artificial Intelligence: Jain Restraint as an Ethic for AI Development”

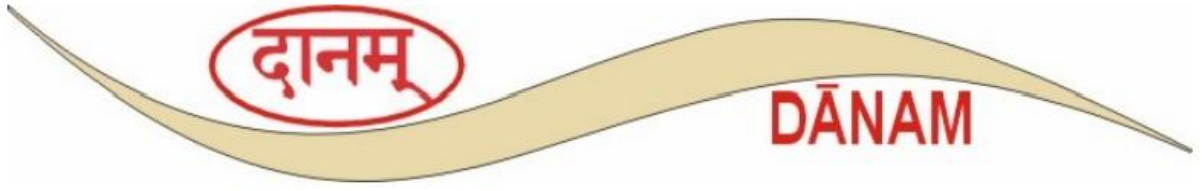
Abstract

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is an umbrella term for technologies that credibly simulate human learning, comprehension, problem-solving, decision-making, parasocial relationships, and creativity. AI development and deployment have also resulted in ever-intensifying environmental, social, and ethical harms. Building on Christopher Miller’s three models of engaged Jain studies as constructive-reproductive, critical-analytical, or critical-constructive, this paper presents case studies of Jain leadership on AI, as well as several unique opportunities Jain ethics provide moving forward.

Jain ethics have endured with remarkable cohesion, personal and philosophical meaning-making, and decision-science pragmatics for thousands of years. Most AI use substantially violates the five core Jain vows (*vrata*) of non-harm, truthfulness, non-stealing, sensual restraint, and non-greed (*ahimsā*, *satya*, *asteya*, *brahmacharya*, and *aparigraha*), and is also complicit in three impermissible harms: direct, indirect, and approved (*kṛta*, *kārita*, and *anumata*). However, Jain ethics offer valuable interventions not only in AI construction and deployment, but also in positive moral duty and technological narratives. This paper presents critical-constructive possibilities as informed by contemporary Jain discourse, ethical restraint, and an ethos of re-commitment to Jain personal virtue.

Bio:

Agni Hogaboom (they/them) is a Master’s student in the Engaged Jain Studies program (Veganism, Animals and Ecology Concentration) at Claremont School of Theology, as well as the Academic Project Coordinator with Arihanta Institute. Their research interests and organizing work include climate crisis community response, grassroots activism, and the intersections of rights and interests in trans, vegan, and human-animal



studies. In addition, their work engages with mutual support between academic, mainstream, and community resilience projects in the face of significant climate and political adversities. Agni holds a Bachelor's Degree in Engineering, is a Certified Mediator and Registered Yoga Instructor, and serves as the Academic Project Coordinator with Arihanta Institute. They are also the Vice President of the Board of the Dispute Resolution Center of Grays Harbor and Pacific Counties in Washington State. They are a cyclist, ethical vegan, Sanskrit scholar, and B-movie cinephile, and live with their partner and three cats on the Washington coast.

Paper 5: Jasjit Singh, University of Leeds

“Sikh Dharma and AI: Authority, Form and Ethical Custodianship”

Abstract

This paper examines how generative AI is reshaping the conditions under which religious authority is recognized. Focusing on Sikh contexts, I analyze recent controversies surrounding AI-generated images, text, and scriptural references to show that the primary disruption is not simply factual error but form-level distortion. These include depiction violations, the erasure of lineage, and the circulation of blended or hallucinated Gurbani lines. I argue that these effects arise from platform logics that prioritize fluency, speed, and visual impact over provenance and interpretive discipline. While AI systems reorganize religious knowledge as decontextualized output, Dharma, understood as a framework of right action and disciplined conduct, foregrounds the importance of context, lineage, and accountability in the encounter and transmission of knowledge. Read in this way, dharma provides a critical lens through which disruptions of form, transmission, and responsibility emerge as ethical problems, rather than merely technical limitations.

Bio:

Professor Jasjit Singh is Professor of Religion and Global Engagement at the University of Leeds and Pro-Dean International for the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Cultures. His research focuses on religious transmission, digital religion, and the representation of religious minorities, with a particular emphasis on Sikh diasporas. He co-chairs the Sikh Studies Unit at the American Academy of Religion and has held visiting positions internationally, including at the National University of Singapore. His current work explores the interaction between religion and technology.